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Letter dated 18 July 2018 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council

The present letter is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 2409 (2018), in which it was requested that contingency planning be undertaken for the consideration of a temporary reinforcement of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and that all options be examined, including inter-mission cooperation, for the sole purpose of implementing the mandate of the Mission. Outlined herein is a scenario envisaging a potential deterioration of the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and corresponding options for the temporary reinforcement of MONUSCO, to allow the Mission to continue to implement the core priorities under its current mandate.

Planning scenario

One broad scenario, with several variations, was considered when developing and testing the feasibility of options to temporarily reinforce MONUSCO, within the existing mandated framework and assumptions and whereby the comprehensive and inclusive political agreement of 31 December 2016 would remain the relevant framework for the political process. The scenario was premised on the idea that the electoral process would be significantly challenged at some point around key deadlines in the electoral calendar, in particular during the run-up to the elections or when the electoral results are announced. Such challenges could include, but may not necessarily be limited to, an announced delay in the elections, a boycott by major stakeholders, key opposition figures with significant support bases being prevented from registering as presidential candidates or key opposition leaders located abroad being prevented from returning to the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Any of those situations could lead to a sudden deterioration of the overall security situation. Such a setback could potentially trigger a further increase in violence and repression, including in areas of the country that have not yet been affected by civil unrest and where there is little or no MONUSCO presence, such as in Equateur, Nord-Ubangi and Sud-Ubangi Provinces, which could further affect the already difficult humanitarian situation.

Should such unrest increase significantly, MONUSCO would face challenges in implementing its current mandate within its existing areas of operations and within existing resources. The Mission would be unable to respond to all threats to civilians across the country. In such a case, MONUSCO would require additional resources to continue to implement its mandate, including good offices, political engagement and advocacy, human rights monitoring and reporting and, more broadly, enhancement of the protection of civilians.

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Ongoing adjustments

In the scenario described above, the Mission would be required to enhance the safety of its personnel and premises, strengthen its engagement with local, national and regional authorities, dispatch mobile teams for monitoring and early warning, help to de-escalate tensions and, where necessary, deploy uniformed capabilities to address protection threats. This would be largely achieved through the reallocation of its existing resources in line with the adjustments envisaged following the strategic review conducted in 2017, which had been aimed at enhancing the Mission's ability to deal with a potentially volatile and fluid political and security situation in the run-up to, and the immediate aftermath of, the elections.

As recommended in the strategic review and in the framework of reforms currently under way, the timely deployment of two additional rapidly deployable battalions, to be based in Kasai and Tanganyika, along with the necessary enablers, including air assets, will be key to providing the MONUSCO force with the requisite mobility and flexibility to support efforts to contain violence in rural hotspots where the Mission does not have a significant fixed presence. Alongside the Mission's remaining framework battalions, the rapidly deployable battalions are addressing and responding to protection threats in rural areas. The fourth battalion should be operational by September 2018, while measures are being taken by the Secretariat to accelerate the deployment of the fifth by October 2018.

Efforts to render formed police units more flexible and agile and to deploy additional armoured personnel carriers for each unit before the electoral period, as requested in the strategic review, are aimed at preventing and reducing tensions in urban settings. Following considerable efforts by the Secretariat to generate the remaining 13 armoured personnel carriers, 5 are currently ready to be deployed and are expected to be in the Mission area before the elections, while efforts are under way to expedite the deployment of the remaining carriers.

Options for temporary reinforcement

In order to have a meaningful impact on the ability of the Mission to deliver on its mandate during the current challenging electoral period, additional military and/or police reinforcements would need to be deployed by November 2018, at the latest, which would require immediate decisions. Various options were explored.

Inter-mission cooperation arrangements for additional troops or police were not considered to be a viable option at this stage, given the challenges facing the other peacekeeping operations deployed in the region, such as the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic and the United Nations Mission in South Sudan. Deploying units from peacekeeping operations located further away from the Democratic Republic of the Congo would be prohibitive in terms of the time needed and its potential cost. Efforts to generate formed police units through inter-mission cooperation in the past were not successful. By the same token, following consultations, there appears to be little appetite at the present time among key partners to consider the establishment of an over-the-horizon force — along the lines of Operation Artemis or a European Union force — not least because the situation today presents a very different set of circumstances from those of either the Ituri crisis of 2003 or the 2006 elections.

Options for deploying additional troops through the Peacekeeping Capability Readiness System were explored, but it was determined that smaller, more mobile units generated by troop-contributing countries that already had troops on the ground with MONUSCO would have a greater impact and could be deployed more rapidly. The most realistic option for reinforcing the MONUSCO force while remaining

within the mandated troop ceiling would therefore be the temporary reinforcement of the force reserve infantry battalion in Goma or the framework battalion in Kinshasa, through the generation of one or two additional force reserve infantry companies. Further to consultations with potential contributing countries, those units could be in the Democratic Republic of the Congo by November 2018.

The companies could be integrated into the existing unit with minimal requirements for logistical support and no additional camp or accommodation arrangements. The units could supplement protection of civilians activities and enhance the protection of United Nations personnel and premises in large cities with no MONUSCO force presence, such as Kisangani and Lubumbashi.

It should be clearly understood that even a relatively sizeable reinforcement of the Mission's military component is unlikely to have a significant impact in the face of a potential deterioration of the situation marked by widespread election-related violence in Kinshasa and other major cities such as Goma, Lubumbashi and Kisangani.

Options for deploying additional formed police units through the Peacekeeping Capability Readiness System were also explored. Deployment through the System before the elections would be possible only by means of strategic airlifting, provided that funds were available to sustain the high costs of air transportation. Furthermore, the police-contributing countries identified by the System would need to commit to their participation in support of MONUSCO and to an envisaged short-term deployment. A decision by the Security Council authorizing such a reinforcement, including to raise the Mission's authorized police strength, would be required immediately.

Therefore, considering the above-mentioned conditions and other unforeseen factors, it is unlikely that those units would arrive at the identified location in the Democratic Republic of the Congo before the electoral period. The deployment of additional formed police units through the Peacekeeping Capability Readiness System was therefore not considered a feasible option.

A more realistic option would be to increase the number of individual police officers while remaining within the authorized police strength of the Mission, by filling the 71 vacant positions for police officers. A total of 42 police officers are available to be deployed in approximately 21 days. The remaining officers could be deployed within some three to seven weeks. The individual police officers would contribute to the Mission's early warning, prevention and mitigation efforts and to the reduction of potential tensions through information collection and engagement with the national police, local communities and local authorities. That would allow MONUSCO to enhance its capacity to address potential crises in major urban centres, such as Kisangani and Lubumbashi. Those additional police officers, who would work in close cooperation with the Congolese National Police, could also contribute to enhanced accountability of the national police force through the monitoring of public order management, detention periods and detainees' rights.

They would also contribute to the Mission's comprehensive approach to the protection of civilians and to better monitoring of human rights violations, along with the substantive components of MONUSCO. The deployment of investigators with forensic capacity among those police officers would also support human rights investigations.

Resources

Resources associated with the above-mentioned options for temporary reinforcement were not included in the MONUSCO budget for the 2018/19 period,

even though the general threat environment had been taken into account. Considering the budget for the 2018/19 period adopted by the General Assembly, the Mission would need to reprioritize its resources to the extent possible, and, even though it would be possible to absorb the cost of all the options for temporary reinforcements from within existing resources, it must clearly be noted that doing so would mean that some key activities would have to be suspended.

Conclusion

The successful completion of ongoing efforts to render the MONUSCO force more flexible, mobile and agile through the generation and timely deployment of the fourth and fifth rapidly deployable battalions will ensure that the Mission advances in the implementation of its comprehensive approach to protection, which is focused on early warning, prevention and addressing the root causes of spreading violence and insecurity.

Ultimately, however, political engagement — including from the Security Council — will remain the most effective means of ensuring that MONUSCO is able to continue to deliver on its mandated strategic priorities, namely, to support the implementation of the agreement of 31 December 2016 and the electoral process, as well as the protection of civilians.

The priority of MONUSCO during the electoral period will therefore be to focus on political efforts at the local, national and regional levels, as well as on prevention and mitigation. To that end, good offices efforts are under way, and MONUSCO continues to promote confidence-building measures. The Mission also continues its human rights monitoring and engagement efforts, as well as its engagement with national security forces on the non-lethal use of force in public order management.

As always, I count on Member States to provide MONUSCO with the support and resources required to fulfil its mandated priorities during the present decisive period. However, the responsibility for sustaining a peaceful environment during this sensitive period rests first and foremost with the Congolese authorities and people, in particular the political stakeholders. They themselves must assume this responsibility, exercise restraint and refrain from any actions that could contribute to a deterioration of the current fragile situation. I hope that the upcoming visit of the Security Council to the Democratic Republic of the Congo will help in calling upon all key Congolese political stakeholders to take the steps necessary to ensure the holding of credible, peaceful and timely elections.

(*Signed*) António **Guterres**